

Puget Sound Partnership 2009 Three Year Work Program Update San Juan County – WRIA 2

Introduction

In May 2009, each of the fourteen watersheds chapter areas submitted three-year work program updates on accomplishments, status of actions, and proposed actions that built on the 2006, 2007, 2008 three-year work programs. These work programs are intended to provide a road map for implementation of the salmon recovery plans and to help establish a recovery trajectory for the first three years of implementation.

The 2009 Three-Year Work Program Update is the fourth year of implementation since the Recovery Plan was finalized in 2005. The Puget Sound Partnership, as the regional organization for salmon recovery performs an assessment of the development and review of these work programs in order to be as effective as possible in the coming years.

The feedback below is intended to assist the watershed recovery plan implementation team as it continues to address actions and implementation of their salmon recovery plan. The feedback is also used by the Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team (RITT), the Recovery Council Work Group, and the Puget Sound Partnership to inform the continued development and implementation of the regional work program. This includes advancing on issues such as adaptive management, all H integration, and capacity within the watershed teams. The feedback will also stimulate further discussion of recovery objectives to determine what the best investments are for salmon recovery over the next three years.

Guidance for the 2009 work program update reviews

Factors to be considered by the RITT in performing its technical review of the Update included:

- 1) *Consistency question*: Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed's three-year work plan/program consistent with the hypotheses and strategies identified in the Recovery Plan (Volume I and II of the Recovery Plan, NOAA supplement)?
- 2) *Pace/Status question*: Is implementation of the salmon recovery plan on-track for achieving the 10-year goal(s)? If not, why and what are the key priorities to move forward?
- 3) *Sequence/Timing question*: Is the sequencing and timing of actions appropriate for the current stage of implementation?
- 4) *Next big challenge question*: Does the three-year work plan/program reflect any new challenges or adaptive management needs that have arisen over the past year?

Watersheds were also provided with the following four questions, answers to which the Recovery Council Work Group and the Partnership ecosystem recovery coordinators assessed in performing their policy review of the three-year work program:

- 1) *Consistency question:* Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed's three-year work plan/program consistent with the needs identified in the Recovery Chapter (Volume I and II of the Recovery Plan, NOAA supplement)? Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed's three-year work plan/program consistent with the Action Agenda?
- 2) *Pace/Status question:* Is implementation of salmon recovery on-track for achieving the 10-year goals?
- 3) *What is needed question:* What type of support is needed to help support this watershed in achieving its recovery chapter goals? Are there any changes needed in the suites of actions to achieve the watershed's recovery chapter goals?
- 4) *Next big challenge question:* Does the three-year work program reflect any new challenges or adaptive management needs that have arisen over the past year either within the watershed or across the region?

I. Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team Review

The RITT reviewed each of the fourteen individual watershed chapter's salmon recovery three-year work program updates in May and June 2009. The RITT evaluated each individual watershed according to the four questions provided above. In the review, the RITT identified a common set of regional review comments for technical feedback that are applicable to all fourteen watersheds, as well as watershed specific feedback using the four questions. The regional review, along with the watershed specific review comments, are included below.

Puget Sound Recovery Implementation Technical Team Review

RITT Review – 2009 3-yr work plans – Common Themes

The changes to the watershed questions and RITT review questions reflect a stronger focus on obtaining information associated with the status of implementation and the development of the Adaptive Management and Monitoring plans, as it relates to what actions are needed for the next three years. Many of the watersheds had a difficult time answering these questions and either did not answer these questions or did not provide much detail. The intent of the questions was to get watersheds to think about how actions identified on their three-year work plans relate to the current status of implementation, existing assessments, and Adaptive Management Plans. As the RITT reviewed all the work plans, we recognized some common themes we wished to bring to the attention of the watershed groups. While all these may not be able to be addressed in this year's 3-yr work plans, the RITT is available to work with the watersheds to address these in future plans or as part of the Adaptive Management Plan process now in progress.

1. Question 6 to the watersheds: “What is the **status or trends of habitat and salmon populations** in your watershed?” The intention of this question was to begin work on the relationship between projects and a baseline understanding of trends in each watershed and/or watersheds to think about trends, or at least what is happening to monitor/assess trends. This information will become important in developing the adaptive management plans and watersheds should be assembling existing information or developing projects to assess this.

2. Most work plans have been primarily focused on habitat restoration projects. Although habitat restoration is a critical aspect of salmon recovery, it is also important to identify actions related to the implementation of habitat protection and hatchery and harvest management that affect salmon populations, and then start thinking of all projects in terms of **H-integration**. How do each of the H's influence results from the other Hs? Again, this will be an important component of adaptive management, and therefore, should be addressed in the 3-yr work plans now. What is needed to get started on H-integration?

Six steps of h-integration have been suggested to help get started (Shared Strategy workshop 2006):

1. Identify the people needed to participate, covering all Hs
 2. Gain a common understanding of how the H's influence the salmon system
 3. Agree upon common goals for improving salmon
 4. Select a suite of complimentary actions covering the Hs that address the goals (these should then be placed in the work plans)
 5. Document implementation of actions and expected outcomes (in work plans)
 6. Monitor, report, and adjust (adaptive management!)
3. **Habitat protection** was recognized as an important element of salmon recovery in both the Shared Strategy Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan and in the NOAA supplement to to the plan. NOAA, in the supplement, recognized there are a variety of tools available for habitat protection and that a combination of all approaches, including incentives and enhanced regulatory programs likely will be needed to achieve the level of habitat protection required to support salmon recovery in Puget Sound. What was unclear in the Recovery Plan in dealing with protection is whether the current rate of degradation or loss of habitat was taken into consideration when measuring the influence of habitat protection necessary for overall salmon recovery. There are a number of tools/models available for assessing net gain or loss of habitat, and these should be explored by the individual watersheds.

The RITT is available to work with the watersheds to support them in answering these questions and identifying gaps in information. This can be done both via the adaptive management process as well as by inviting RITT liaison/members to attend watershed meetings to address this.

4. Although significant advancement has occurred associated with **prioritization and sequencing** of suites of actions, additional refinement is important in order to restore the functions and processes of the watersheds for salmon recovery. There are a variety of tools that are available, and being used in some watersheds for this endeavor. RITT liaisons are available to talk with watershed leads about ideas on how to proceed.
5. **Updating Recovery Plan chapters**. Another issue that arose was what to do about, or how to document, changes that are being made now to the Salmon Recovery Plan chapter goals or directions. All watersheds have modified their thinking about limiting factors and appropriate strategies and actions to some degree since the plan was adopted. We

expect more changes in the future as we learn more about the systems and we apply results from the Adaptive Management process. Until there is a formal process adopted to document such changes in “plans”, each watershed should be carefully documenting changes in their recovery goals and directions, along with the back up supporting research or work, in their 3-yr work plan narratives. This will allow the RITT to take these changes into account while reviewing the work plans for consistency with “the plan.”

6. One of the biggest challenges associated with implementing the salmon recovery plan for Puget Sound Chinook is the development of realistic, useful, and applicable **Adaptive Management Plans** at the watershed level. The RITT has committed to working closely with the watershed over the next several years to getting these written and implemented. This will be done with a series of work sessions, both with individual watersheds and across watersheds. Much time, commitment, and resources are also needed from the watershed leads, planners and implementers of actions associated with the recovery plan. It will help the collaborative process greatly if watersheds begin addressing the above themes at greater detail each year as they develop their 3-yr work plans. Don’t wait for your first workshop with RITT to get started.

Finally, one of the issues the RITT recognized was that, although the review questions ask for progress towards the “10-yr goals” in the Salmon Recovery Plan, not all Watershed Chapters identified quantitative 10-yr or other short-term goals. The RITT will work with watersheds to identify these types of short-term goals during the development of the Adaptive Management plans.

Watershed Specific Comments for the Watershed:

Implementation of the San Juan County recovery plan is proceeding consistently with the assessment, protection and restoration priorities outlined. Those implementing the plan have highlighted the need to prioritize their protection and restoration actions going forward. They have set themselves up well to do this more detailed prioritization using information from the assessments (especially the “Big Picture” project) in which they have invested their efforts these first few years of recovery plan implementation. The WRIA group is at a sort of crossroads in deciding whether to change the relative balance of assessment (which has been the primary focus due to lack of information to target protection and restoration actions) and diving in more wholeheartedly into the protection and restoration actions themselves.

1. ***Are the suites of actions and top priorities identified in the watershed’s three year work plan/program consistent with the hypotheses and strategies identified in the Recovery Plan (Volume I and II of the Recovery Plan, NOAA supplement)?***

Generally, yes, the WRIA 2 (San Juan County) work program is consistent with the hypotheses and 3 primary strategies for their area (i.e., assessment to inform protection and restoration). The WRIA 2 protection and restoration projects initiated to date have been supported by assessment information, and the WRIA has not gone beyond such evidence to ‘just do it’ in other places. This approach is consistent with that outlined in their plan. Specific actions are not prioritized

beyond categorizing them into Tier 1 (protection) and II (restoration), and the near-term need for that work is acknowledged in their work program.

The San Juan work program gives highest priority to actions focusing on maintaining the function of nearshore habitats in supporting salmon and their food web. These actions primarily fall into those that protect intact nearshore habitats and restore those deemed to have the potential to support juvenile salmon or forage fish for salmon. These actions are consistent with the primary threats (habitat loss and degradation and water quality degradation) identified as limiting factors to the populations of Chinook using San Juan waters. The projects generally include capital and non-capital projects (e.g., influencing protection through CAO work), outreach and education. The WRIA 2 work plan also outlines an important next step to work with the Marine Resources Committee to agree on key elements of nearshore habitats, food webs and salmon life stages to monitor and at what frequency.

2. *Is the implementation of the salmon recovery plan on-track for achieving the 10-year goal(s)? If not, why not and what are the key priorities to move forward?*

Funding cutbacks at all levels of local, state and Federal governments make it unlikely that implementation is on track to achieve 10-year goals. Implementation and possible updating of the plan requires capacity (people, money, and political relationships) to get all the work done. Developing and implementing an adaptive management strategy is a key priority in moving towards longer term goals. Although an adaptive management plan and strategy will not necessarily increase capacity, it would help refine the longer term goals in the plan and ensure that WRIA 2 is moving with the capacity that it has and can acquire in the most efficient manner.

3. *Is the sequencing and timing of actions appropriate for the current stage of implementation?*

At a coarse level (i.e., grouping projects into 2 Tiers), the sequencing of the work program appears to be appropriate. The WRIA 2 efforts thus far have focused on assessments that will generate information to guide further protection and restoration activities. Some protection and restoration efforts have been implemented in these early years of plan implementation, which is in keeping with moving forward with some actions that have relatively high certainty of achieving positive outcomes, while also delaying larger investments until more information about salmon and food web use of nearshore habitats is available. An ongoing challenge for WRIA 2 is to decide how much investment in freshwater habitats (e.g., removing barriers, working on water quality sources) is advisable relative to nearshore-related work. The commitment to further prioritize their Tier I and II projects lists will go a long way towards furthering this discussion and making a judgment call. Some major issues to resolve in their prioritization process include: 1) how to make the transition from an assessment-rich strategy to a more action-orientated strategy; 2) how to represent their first priority of protection actions in their list of near-term projects; and 3) how to strike the appropriate balance between freshwater-orientated projects and nearshore efforts. These discussions are well set up to occur as the RITT and WRIA 2 technical people work through the adaptive management process coming up.

4. *Does the three-year work plan/program reflect any new challenges or adaptive management needs that have arisen over the past year?*

A major need in this watershed is to complete and implement an adaptive management plan and strategy that directly identifies goals/targets, monitoring plans, key uncertainties needing assessment and how to use existing and the newly gained knowledge to make effective decisions to recover salmon. This is identified as a priority need, and the RITT supports such an effort. RITT plans to prioritize getting the watersheds going on adaptive management within the next 16 months and has already started working directly with the San Juan WRIA on this.

Lack of sufficient funds and resources is a major challenge to salmon recovery for all watersheds; it is therefore important to use the funds received wisely and get the most knowledge for future direction out of a well-developed adaptive management plan.

II. Policy Review Comments

The Recovery Council Work Group, an interdisciplinary policy team made up of lead policy staff in federal, state, local agencies, as well as a lead policy staff representative from the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, evaluated each of the fourteen watershed work plans. In addressing their review questions, outlined above, the interdisciplinary team noted both general comments common to all watersheds within the region, as well as significant advancements and issues needing advancement that are watershed specific and need special attention. The general and watershed specific comments follow below.

General Comments for 2009 Three-Year Work Program Updates

In 2009, the watershed three-year work program update process was refined, with input from both watershed groups and the region, to reflect the changing needs of the salmon recovery effort in Puget Sound. Although the spreadsheet will remain the same for the near-term, refinement of the process, including the schedule and questions, will likely continue over the years to accommodate emerging needs and issues.

The 2009 work program updates reflect the continued advancement and increased sophistication of watersheds in strategically identifying important projects and programs. This was perhaps best demonstrated during the recent process to identify ‘shovel-ready’ projects for the NOAA stimulus process, as well as compiling projects in preparation for the 2009-2011 biennial budget request. Similar to the 2007-2009 round of Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration funds, funding in the 2009-2011 round provides watersheds another opportunity to advance important capital and non-capital priorities.

Despite these gains, both in funds and in work programs, many of the watersheds continue to have gaps, to varying degrees, identified in the NOAA supplement as well as in the 2006, 2007, and 2008 work program reviews. Regional assistance to the watershed implementation teams will continue to be needed to fill the needs identified within this 2009 Work Program (see below). Regional assistance will also be needed to continue work towards securing consistent capital and non-capital funds needed to advance recovery work.

Work Program Narratives (Accomplishments, Status Updates, Sequencing and Prioritization): As identified in 2007 and 2008, work program updates are a useful tool for documenting progress toward recovery plan goals and ESU-wide recovery. As a part of the updates, the narratives should continue to be refined to provide a sharper focus on what each watershed expects to accomplish within the three-year period. These narratives should also document what projects have been successfully completed, what programmatic actions are underway, and how successful the watershed has been in implementing the previous year's work plan. This includes documenting how the funds of the previous year are being applied for both on-the-ground projects and capacity within the watersheds. It is also helpful for narratives to include a focused description of how various recovery projects and programs are identified, prioritized, and sequenced. Finally, documentation of what support is needed to implement priority actions will help the region better understand how to support watershed implementation of recovery actions.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management: The majority of watersheds indicated that advancing monitoring and adaptive management was of high priority and the 'next big challenge' in their areas. Some watersheds have already begun developing their own monitoring and adaptive management frameworks and initial monitoring tasks. These efforts are critical to refining the implementation of recovery actions, and to help prioritize how funds are allocated. Additionally, several watersheds have continued to advance their understanding and application of the six steps of H-Integration through the strong support of co-manager resources. It is noteworthy that there is a strong connection between full co-manager engagement within the watershed context and significant progress toward salmon recovery implementation. This work to develop a monitoring and adaptive management plan, as well as advance the h-integration, directly fills a critical gap identified in by NOAA in their supplement to the Recovery Plan. Another element of this work is the recently agreed-upon Pacific Salmon Treaty, which should be funded and then the relevant components incorporated into the effort associated with monitoring and adaptive management.

The region is committed to supporting watersheds advance their efforts to develop and implement a monitoring and adaptive management plan in a way that acknowledges the interaction across habitat, harvest, hatchery, and hydropower management decisions. At the regional scale, several actions have been initiated to advance adaptive management, including:

1. RITT near-term guidance for initial steps;
2. A program to advance monitoring and adaptive management in each watershed chapter area by the RITT and Partnership, which includes looking at the 6 steps of H-Integration;
3. Monitoring for habitat status and trends at the regional scale by the Department of Ecology, starting in the Puget Sound; and
4. Development of a performance management system to identify and hold accountable the appropriate entities at the local, regional, state, and federal levels for actions associated with salmon recovery.

In 2008, three watersheds participated in a pilot project to better understand how implementation actions can be tracked locally and regionally. These three watersheds – North Olympic Peninsula, Green/Duwamish, and Stillaguamish – used considerable resources to participate in this process and have integrated the information that they produced into their local processes in

varying ways. The region is continuing to work on a tracking system and appreciates the effort that went into participating in this pilot project.

The regional team working on the diverse aspects of adaptive management will coordinate with these various efforts in order to ensure that they are consistent and complementary. It will be critical that these efforts continue to advance our existing work and be informed by guidance documents.

Protecting and restoring ecosystem functions and processes for Chinook and other species: Preserving options and addressing threats are critical components of recovery planning both at the local and regional scale. The Chinook Recovery Plan is predicated on the assumption that existing habitat will be protected. Regional work to assess this assumption and to strengthen the regulatory framework is important to advance salmon recovery. The San Juan Initiative has shown that existing regulations along the nearshore are generally not applied in the most protective manner and that nearshore habitat is being lost. The Action Agenda has similarly found that we are not protecting our landscape as originally assumed and that this is a high priority for ecosystem recovery. This includes ecosystem functions associated with water quality and water quantity.

Recovery actions continue to become more complex and expensive. All watersheds are challenged in terms of their capacity to protect habitat and ecosystem functions and processes, as well as to secure future options to implement large-scale, multi-year restoration projects. Protection tools include acquisition of land (e.g., through fee simple purchase or conservation easement), as well as regulations, incentive programs, and education/outreach. An additional tool for both protection and restoration is the continued establishment and coordination with working lands in a way that helps maintain these lands and protects ecosystem functions and processes. Several timely opportunities associated with regulatory tool of protection are currently available, including the upcoming Shoreline Master Program Updates and on-going Critical Areas Updates, as well as the results of the Biological Opinion by NOAA on FEMA's Flood Insurance Program.

Similarly, the availability of consistent, clean water continues to be a concern and a gap identified in the NOAA supplement. It is critical that the work associated with implementation the Action Agenda, primarily through the Department of Ecology and local jurisdictions, advances water quality and quantity issues in a way that supports the watershed groups and advances the recovery of salmon in their areas.

It will be important for watersheds to coordinate and partner with other groups, organizations, and agencies, both locally and regionally, to increase capacity and enhance their ability to successfully identify and implement habitat protection and restoration efforts. Increased capacity for the key participants in watershed recovery efforts is essential to successfully implementing recovery chapters and protecting and restoring the ecosystem functions and processes that Chinook and other species require. The Puget Sound Partnership and the Recovery Council Policy Work Group acknowledge that additional efforts will be needed at the regional scale to assist watershed groups in securing on-going resources needed to protect and restore ecosystem functions and processes.

Nearshore Habitats, Functions, and Processes: There continues to be a need to advance our understanding of nearshore habitats, functions, and processes associated with Chinook recovery. The results of several nearshore fish assessments funded in 2007 will be available in the upcoming year and will help fill a major gap in our knowledge of salmonid use of the nearshore. The Puget Sound Partnership and Policy Work Group recognize the need to support these watersheds in translating the assessments into a prioritization framework for protecting and restoring the nearshore. We also recognize the importance of these assessments for advancing monitoring and adaptive management plans in the nearshore. Additionally, there is a continued need make decisions regarding the sequencing and prioritizing of nearshore areas for protection across the Puget Sound. Finally, we need to develop a standardized framework to not only monitor nearshore fish presence, but to also improve our understanding of how fish utilize these areas.

Multi-species planning and Action Agenda implementation: Implementation of the Action Agenda, along with multi-species planning efforts such as for the Puget Sound Steelhead, requires significant effort to sequence and prioritize resources and actions. The Puget Sound Partnership and the Policy Work Group recognize that implementation of salmon recovery actions remains a high priority, as identified in the Action Agenda. Maintaining a focus on the priorities within the salmon recovery plan, as identified in each watershed chapter plan, will be increasingly challenging and require continued investment of time, resources, and support.

In terms of multi-species planning efforts, Puget Sound Steelhead were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in May 2007 and a NOAA-appointed Technical Review Team (TRT) is working to identify populations and habitat criteria for the listing. This information is anticipated to be available by the end of 2009. NOAA, the co-managers, and the watersheds are currently discussing options for Puget Sound Steelhead recovery planning. Resources are needed to support the watersheds in steelhead planning over the next several years.

Watershed-Specific Comments

Significant Advancements

- Achieved progress towards assessing high priorities for protection. Near completion of significant assessments, with a planned shift in focus to protection efforts
- Taking the lead in beginning the adaptive management process that will assist in a timely update of local recovery plan, and assist in project prioritization
- Active involvement integrating salmon recovery priorities in CAO update, which could serve as a model for other watersheds
- Effective and strategic use of limited resources, such as funding and volunteer support

Issues Needing Advancement

- Increase focus on protection efforts that are supported by existing science
- Begin initial work to prepare for SMP update. Continue to advance the Action Agenda nexus for salmon recovery, such as the San Juan Initiative
- Continue to work to secure local funds for salmon recovery